

Department News and Updates

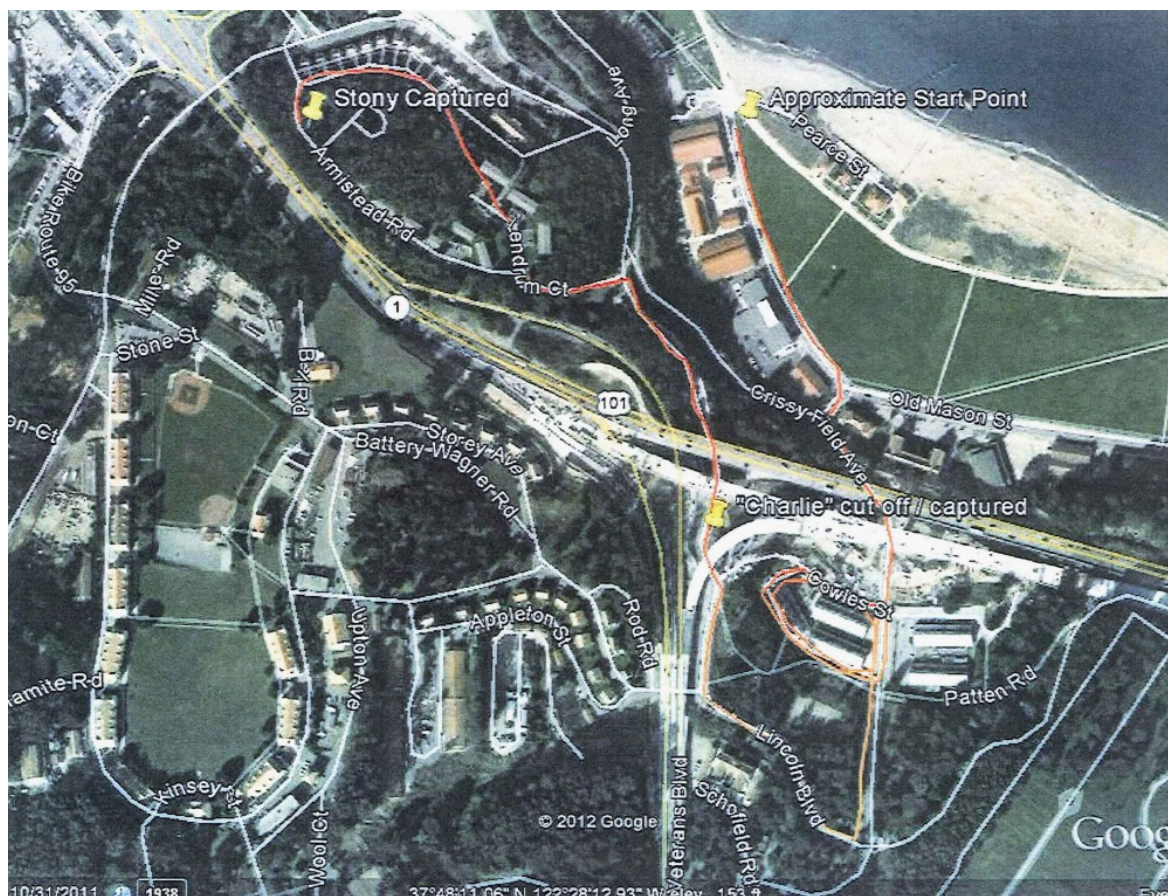
SFPD Statement on Decision in Vicious & Dangerous Dog Investigation

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Following the August 6, 2012 attack of a United States Park Police Department mounted officer and his horse by a dog near Crissy Field in the Presidio, the San Francisco Police Department's Vicious and Dangerous Animal Unit conducted a hearing. During that hearing, evidence was presented by both the US Park Police, which had completed a comprehensive investigation of the incident and by the owner of the dog.

In this case, a US Park Police Officer was patrolling an area of the Park that is open to off leash, voice control exercise of dogs. This area is not a fenced in dog run or dog park as has been alluded to in other accounts. Dog owners using this area are required to maintain control of their pets.

While passing through this area, a dog identified as an American Staffordshire Terrier saw the Park Police mounted team and ran towards them, covering approximately 200 feet. Upon reaching the equestrian team, the dog leapt up and bit the officer on his leg. The officer ordered the dog owner to take control of his dog. The owner failed to do so allowing the dog to attack the horse, biting him on the abdomen, then locking on the horse's leg. The horse fell and threw the officer who landed on the ground and was knocked unconscious. The horse ran from the scene with the dog in pursuit. The investigation determined that the horse ran (approximately one mile) back to its stable, a place of safety. Unfortunately, the stable doors were closed and the pursuing dog attacked the horse a second time, inflicting additional injuries. The horse ran to the rear of the stable where the dog attacked for a third time. Escaping this attack, the desperate horse ran in a westerly direction (another one-half mile) to the area of Armistead Road and Ramsel Court with the dog still on attack. A Park Police Motorcycle Officer caught up to the pair and intervened ending any further attack.

The fleeing horse covered approximately one and a half miles in its efforts to get away from the pursuing dog. As a result of this attack, the horse was bitten thirteen times, sustaining serious bite wounds to its legs, hind quarters, chest and abdominal areas. As a result, the horse was stabled for over twenty days and has returned to limited service. The Officer's riding boot prevented injury from the dog's bite, but he did sustain a serious injury when he was thrown from the horse. The officer has since returned to duty.

In coming to a decision in this investigation, the Police Department's Vicious and Dangerous Animals Unit took into consideration the circumstances of the case, the willingness and ability of the dog's owner to take responsibility for the animal and the health, safety and welfare of the community.

It was determined that the dog exhibited human directed aggression and an extremely high degree of “prey drive” demonstrated by its extensive pursuit and multiple attacks on the horse. The suggestion that the attacking dog was reacting out of fear is inappropriate as the location of the horse’s wounds were not consistent with injuries that would be caused by a fearful dog, which typically bite at hooves and ankles. The pursuit and bites to the horse’s torso are indicative of a desire to seriously injure or kill. Weighing the evidence presented at the hearing, the hearing officer made the difficult decision that the dog was a “vicious and dangerous animal” and had no alternative but to order the animal be euthanized.

The Vicious and Dangerous Animals Unit does not take such decisions lightly and makes every effort to find remedies to keep animals with their owners. In the vast majority of dog bite cases, accommodations are made allowing the dog to remain with the owner, with certain restrictions. Unfortunately, there are cases in which an animal is deemed dangerous and the safety and welfare of the community dictates that the animal be euthanized. The Unit receives, on average, 450 dog bite reports per year. Of those cases, the Unit holds approximately 120 “vicious and dangerous dog” hearings where sadly five percent of those hearings result in an order to euthanize. In some of those cases, the owners come to the same conclusion and voluntarily have the animal put down.

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